

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 /055 W

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P R 220850Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8020

INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, KS

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT PARK ANNOUNCES REFERENDUM

1. SUMMARY: ON JANUARY 22, PRESIDENT PARK ANNOUNCED HE WILL SUBMIT HIS GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES TO NATIONAL REFERENDUM UNDER ARTICLE 49 OF CONSTITUTION. NO SPECIFIC DATE HAS YET BEEN SET FOR REFERENDUM, ALTHOUGH ANNOUNCEMENT SAID IT WOULD BE HELD WITHIN 20 TO 60 DAYS. OPPOSITION LEADERS HAVE INDICATED THEY ARE OPPOSED TO ACTION BUT WOULD HOLD OFFICIAL COMMENT UNTIL KIM YONG SAM AND OTHER LEADERS RETURN TO SEOUL NEXT WEEK. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESIDENT PARK IN HIS TELEVISED ANNOUNCEMENT TO NATION REITERATED HIS GOVERNMENT'S ACHIEVEMENTS, INDICATING THAT PROPOSED REFERENDUM WILL OFFER VOTERS CHOICE OF SUPPORTING OR REJECTING HIS ADMINISTRATION AND THUS HIMSELF. HE SAID IF HIS GOVERNMENT IS GIVEN A NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE, HE WOULD STEP DOWN. PARK REITERATED HIS BELIEF THAT IN VIEW OF CONTINUING NORTH KOREAN THREAT, YUSHIN CONSTITUTION AND WHAT HE CLAIMED WAS RESULTING UNITY OF KOREAN PEOPLE MUST REMAIN INTACT IN ORDER FOR NATION TO SURVIVE.

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KOREAN PEOPLE, HE SAID, ARE ENJOYING CONSIDERABLE

FREEDOM ALREADY AND UNDER OLD CONSTITUTION THERE WAS
NOTHING BUT WASTE, INEFFICIENCY, CONFUSION AND
IRRESPONSIBILITY.

3. WHILE ACTUAL WORDING OF QUESTION ON BALLOT HAS
NOT YET BEEN ANNOUNCED, PRESS INDICATED QUESTION
WOULD BE SIMPLY IF VOTER SUPPORTED OR OPPOSED MAJOR
POLICIES OF PRESIDENT. IT IS ALSO NOT CLEAR AT
PRESENT TIME WHETHER CURRENT LAW ON REFERENDUMS,
WHICH PROHIBITS VIRTUALLY ALL FORMS OF CAMPAIGNING,
WILL BE APPLIED UNCHANGED.

4. LOCAL PRESS IS CARRYING STORY THAT NDP LEADER
KIM YONG SAM IN LOS ANGELES SPOKE OUT AGAINST
REFERENDUM, CALLING IT ANOTHER "COUP D'ETAT".
HE IS QUOTED AS SAYING ACTION WOULD BE ANOTHER
MEANS OF MANIPULATING KOREAN VOTER AND PRESIDENT
SHOULD INSTEAD STEP DOWN.

5. NPD LEADERS IN SEOUL INFORMALLY SAID PARTY
WOULD OPPOSE REFERENDUM, BUT PUT OFF FULLER STATEMENT
UNTIL KIM YONG-SAM'S AND OTHER MEMBERS' RETURN.
FORMER PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE KIM TAE CHUNG WAS
QUOTED AS SAYING IT WAS ONLY AN ILLUSION THAT GOVERNMENT
COULD SETTLE ITS DIFFICULTIES BY THIS MEANS. NATIONAL COUNCIL
FOR RESTORATION OF DEMOCRACY (NCRD) SAID IT WAS USELESS
TO HOLD REFERENDUM UNDER EXISTING LAWS.
SNEIDER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, SPEECHES, REFERENDUMS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 22 JAN 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975SEOUL00452
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750024-0850
From: SEOUL
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750130/aaaababe.tel
Line Count: 89
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <15 JUL 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <16 JUL 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESIDENT PARK ANNOUNCES REFERENDUM
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, KS, (PAK CHONG-HUI)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006